SILK





In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful and Compassionate





SILK

13th to 18th centuries

Treasures from the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar

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The National Council for Culture,
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FOREWORD

Over the past fifteen hundred years, silk has formed a fundamental part of the cultural tradition of the Islamic world. We can read about fabulous silk costumes and magnificent tents, and accounts that tell of whole cities made of silk, often adorned with precious metals, with colours so rich that people were overwhelmed by their sheer beauty – but even such descriptions cannot truly express how wondrous these 'woven palaces' must have looked. In the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar, is a group of panels brocaded with gold thread that must have been used to line the interior of an imperial tent of the Ilkhanid rulers of Iran and Central Asia in the late thirteenth century. They are the only set of tent panels known from this period. The magnificence of the Timurid court in Samarqand in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century is expressed by the only silk carpet extant from that period. Undoubtedly a person of extreme importance, perhaps Timur himself, would have sat on the central medallion. Timur was a renowned chess master, and depicted in front of the medallion is a chess board, so one can imagine what important matches may have been played out on this most beautiful carpet.

Remarkably few of the silk textiles made for the great palaces of the Islamic world survive today. The collection of the Museum of Islamic Art contains silks that express the wonders of our past, the imagination of our artists and the skill of our weavers and dyers. An example is a superb curtain decorated with calligraphy, which adorned the walls of the Alhambra in Granada during the time of the fifteenth-century Nasrid rulers of Spain and is in pristine condition. The weaving of silk velvet and embellishment with gold and silver thread reached their artistic zenith in Safavid Iran in the sixteenth century under Shah Tahmasp, and the Museum has two different loom widths of velvet from the imperial workshops, one depicting a standing princess and kneeling courtier, the other with court ladies in a garden. Four other silks from the collection provide a glimpse into the splendour of the Ottoman court. Perhaps my favourite textile (detail opposite) is a small but truly great work of art, woven in the samit technique, which comes from the era of the Sultanate rulers who governed India from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. This panel, possibly once part of a wall decoration, and depicting a reciprocal pattern of interlocking birds, is a masterpiece of design by any standards.

Sheikh Saud bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani
President
The National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage

INTRODUCTION

There are four main textile fibres: silk, wool, cotton and linen. This exhibition is focused on silk, but we should first make brief mention of the other three. Although it is natural to think of wool as the first fibre used by humans for weaving, this is by no means the case. Linen, derived from the flax plant, was in use as far back as 7000 BC. It is around this time that sheep were first domesticated, but these sheep had a hairy coat like that of a deer, too short to be useful for making cloth. Selective breeding eventually produced sheep with a woolly fleece, and the first woollen textiles appear in the archaeological record around 3000 BC. The third main fibre used today, cotton, has an intriguing history. Its early use seems to be centred in India, where scraps of cotton cloth have been discovered that date to around 2750 BC.[1] The cotton used at that time came from a tree, *Gossypium arboreum*, indigenous to India, southern China and South-east Asia.[2] The use of cotton was, in practice, limited by the long time it took for the seeds of the cotton tree to ripen, which meant that cotton could only be harvested under tropical conditions. In the early centuries of the Christian era a smaller, short-lived cotton-yielding plant, *Gossypium herbaceum*, began to be cultivated. The seeds of this plant ripened much more quickly, so it could be grown in cooler, more northerly climates. With this discovery, cotton cultivation and use spread widely. By the fifteenth century herbaceous cotton was being cultivated throughout the Mediterranean, through Central Asia to China. What is really curious is that the same discovery was made in the New World, in Central America, around the same time and with the same result, but using different species. When contact was made between the Old World and the New in the late fifteenth century, the New World cottons were found to be superior. Today practically all commercially grown cottons are hybrids between the Old and the New World species.

The history of the use of silk certainly begins in China. There is a well-recorded legend that the process of obtaining silken fibres from the cocoon of the silk moth was discovered there some four and a half thousand years ago, during the late Stone Age. We now know, however, that the history can be pushed back another thousand years thanks to the recent excavation in China of scraps of woven silk that can be dated to around 3650 BC.[3]

When the discovery was made that it was possible to obtain silken threads from the cocoons formed by the larvae of a moth, it remained a well-kept secret. Like so many discoveries it must have been made by chance, thanks to a specific conjunction of events. In this case the crucial factor was the particular species of moth. In the wild the larvae of many moth species produce silken cocoons, but until very recently it has

not been possible to obtain an unbroken silken filament from them. The difference is that the silk of the cultivated silkworm is perfectly round in cross-section, whereas the silk fibre of the many wild species is flattened. The key observation made in China so long ago was that if cocoons of this one species are put into hot water it is possible to 'unwind' the silken filaments completely to obtain a thread up to a kilometre long; if you try the same with the cocoons of a wild silkworm, the threads become tangled and cannot be 'unwound'. The threads obtained from cocoons of the cultivated silkworm are immensely strong and can be woven into a clean, sheer fabric that is also warm to wear. At first the use of silk in China was reserved for the elite, but this privilege could not be controlled and in time the wearing of silk became widespread; ultimately silk became an item of trade and even a form of currency. Nevertheless the precise method of producing silk remained a secret.

Much has been written about how and when the knowledge of breeding silkworms (sericulture) and the method of unwinding the cocoons (silk reeling) spread outside China, but it has proved difficult to reconstruct the history from the few available sources. We do know that silken cloth was imported and worn in western Asia and the Mediterranean world for several centuries before it was known how to produce the silk itself. Furthermore we know that there was a significant trade in raw silk, since it has been found in textiles evidently made in the West.[4] From this distance in time the size and importance of this trade can only be guessed at, but it is clear that weavers in the Near East, almost certainly in Iran, took the newly available silk fibre and applied it to techniques that were then in use for patterning woollen cloths. The result was a major development in weaving technology – the invention of samit. The new weaving technique made it possible to produce complex, weft-patterned, curvilinear designs that repeated in the length and width of the fabric (see cat. no. 15).

Knowledge of sericulture spread both east to Japan and west to the Tarim basin around the third or fourth century AD.[5] By the sixth century the representatives of wealth and power in the Byzantine west were clamouring for silk and resented the fact that their neighbours, the Persians, controlled the flow of silk from the east – a situation that was to be repeated many times in the ensuing millennium. A much quoted passage in the writings of Procopius, the none-too-flattering historian, records that the Emperor Justinian (around AD 550) was informed by some Indian monks who had been travelling in 'Serindia' (possibly Central Asia) that silk was made by certain worms, and though they could not bring the worms they could bring the eggs from which the worms hatched.[6] Justinian promised them great rewards if they could prove

this, which Procopius tells us they did. This, at least, is one story of how sericulture arrived in the Mediterranean region, though Theophanes has Indian monks bringing the seeds from 'the land of the Seres'.

Whether or not these accounts represent what actually happened is uncertain, particularly as the successful breeding of the domesticated silkworm requires the simultaneous cultivation of a particular species of mulberry tree, something that could not have happened overnight. What is clear is that by the time of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, silk cloth and clothing were widely available in the Near East and the wearing of silk was seen as a desirable luxury, suitable as a reward in the next world for those who live a righteous life in this one, as the following quotations from the Quran illustrate:

18:32. ... *theirs will be Gardens of Eden, wherein rivers flow beneath them; therein they will be given armlets of gold and will wear green robes of finest silk and gold embroidery, reclining upon thrones therein. Blest the reward, and fair the resting place!*

22:23. *Lo! Allah will cause those who believe and do good works to enter Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will be allowed armlets of gold, and pearls, and their raiment therein will be silk.*

35:33. *Gardens of Eden! They enter them wearing armlets of gold and pearl and their raiment therein is silk.*

76:21. *Their raiment will be fine green silk and gold embroidery. Bracelets of silver will they wear. Their Lord will slake their thirst with a pure drink.*

It is also clear that in early Islamic society if you actually wore silk clothing this was seen as a sign of self-indulgence, sensuality and love of worldly possessions. For although there is nothing in the Quran that specifically forbids the wearing of silk, oral tradition is strong in condemning the practice as contrary to the Muslim ideals of simplicity, piety and personal austerity. Furthermore, self-beautification was thought allowable for a woman but inappropriate and effeminate for a man. Accordingly oral tradition condemns the wearing of pure silk by men, but not by women. While for Muslims this prohibition has always been present in the background, it has frequently been ignored, and the conscientious believer could still wear silk while avoiding the prohibition by using one of the various types of silken cloth that were not pure silk but a mixture of silk and cotton. Needless to say the various schools of Islamic law differ in the detailed interpretation of this prohibition, such as whether or not it is permissible to recline on silk furnishings.

As sericulture spread so did the latest development in silk-weaving technology in Iran. It is significant that in Sasanian Iran the fashion in court circles during the sixth century was for silks bearing a design consisting of repeating roundels. Each roundel has a border resembling a string of pearls and is filled with either single or opposing pairs of creatures. As weavers learned the new technology it seems that the fashion for Sasanian-style roundels went along with it. The result of this was that the Sasanian style spread to Spain in the west, throughout the Byzantine and Islamic worlds and even as far as China in the east. The Chinese imitation of designs that were fashionable at the Sasanian court is seen as evidence that Iran was the 'market leader' in silk weaving in the early seventh century, but there was also a direct influence from Iran brought about by the arrival at the Tang court of the remnants of the Sasanian royal family fleeing from the conquering Arabs.

In China, the heartland of silk, weavers quickly adopted and perfected the new technology and in the ensuing centuries were able to adapt their patterns for export to the Islamic market. The Sasanian roundel style, which had been carried far and wide with the spread of silk-weaving skills, was profoundly influential and persisted for many centuries. A direct descendant is seen in the tent panels illustrated here (cat. no. 19), which are decorated with large roundels containing a pair of confronting birds. More distant echoes are present in the Spanish textile with confronting lions (cat. no. 2) and even in the Indian silk with confronting mythical beasts (cat. no. 16).

Silk-weaving technology continued to progress and somewhere around the year AD 1000 a further development was made which resulted in the weave we now know as lampas, a combination of two different woven structures. Lampas weave gradually replaced samit in the production of high quality silks. Such silks were immensely valuable, as indeed were the complex silks of earlier years, and they almost invariably appear in the list of gifts exchanged between rulers. We owe the preservation of many early silks to their use in Christian Europe either as the wrapping of relics or in ecclesiastical garments. A further enhancement in terms of value, though not new technically, was the enrichment of the cloth by weaving into it threads of shining gold. These golden threads were produced in a variety of ways. They could be thin strips of metal (gold or gilded silver), thin strips of metal wound around a fibre core (usually silk), strips of gilded paper or leather, or strips of gilded paper or leather wound around a fibre core. In the medieval world this type of textile was known as 'cloth of gold'. Examples woven in Iran and Central Asia prior to the Mongol conquest are known; they are few and among them are pieces of remarkable beauty and

technical refinement. When the Mongols, under the leadership of Chingis Khan, swept into the Near East, a mainly urban-agricultural and predominantly Islamic region, the demand for cloth of gold increased enormously. The values and traditions of the Mongols, though mostly unwritten, stemmed from the culture of the steppe nomads, a culture that extended back into prehistory. From the excavation of the graves of wealthy nomads as far back as Scythian times, we know that they liked to wear gold ornaments sewn to their outer garments. For the Mongols cloth of gold became the equivalent. It was light, portable, immensely valuable and resplendent with the gleam of actual gold. The Mongol coat illustrated here (cat. no. 18) is a fine example; though it is somewhat dulled by burial, in certain light conditions it is possible to get an impression of how truly splendid the clothing made from cloth of gold really was.

The Mongol love of cloth of gold, which they called *nasij*, opens an extraordinary chapter in the history of textiles, one that has caused much confusion and difficulty, but which has recently been illuminated by the brilliant historical researches of Thomas Allsen and the parallel study by textile specialists of newly available material from Tibet and other sources.[7] In warfare among urban communities it had long been the practice for the conquering army to take what valuables they could carry, to take women and children as concubines and slaves, and to take skilled craftsmen into compulsory service. In their quest for a supply of cloth of gold the Mongols took skilled weavers from the territories they conquered and put them to work in factories under their control. As a result weavers from quite different traditions of design and technology were obliged to work together. The end result was an extraordinary blending of styles and techniques, in particular between the traditions of China and those current in Iran and Central Asia. To make matters even more confusing 'Tartar cloth' became so fashionable and envied that it was copied in weaving areas to the west, such as Italy. A classic example of this blend of styles is seen in the magnificent panels (cat. no. 19; see opposite), which are likely to have been part of the interior furnishing of a majestic Mongol tent. Iranian-style roundels with confronting birds are combined with Chinese-style dragons and paeony scrolls. At the top is a 'pearl border', derived ultimately from Sasanian Iran, though it was also copied in Chinese textiles.

The Mongol rulers of Iran, the Ilkhans (ruled 1256–1335), eventually adopted the culture of the people they governed. The history of textiles produced during this period is obscure and at the moment is inseparable from the history of textiles produced under wider Mongol rule. Towards the end of this period a number of illustrated

manuscripts were produced that depict the use of what must be knotted-pile carpets. Their patterns are generally small in scale and repeat throughout the field in the manner of a tiled floor. A similar style is found in some of the so-called Seljuk carpets preserved in Turkey,[8] and in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spanish carpets.[9] No Persian examples from this period are known, though the carpet illustrated here



Reconstruction of cat. no. 19, as it would have been used to line the inside of a tent

(cat. no. 20) is close in style. This carpet could date from the late fourteenth century and has the distinction of being the oldest known knotted-pile carpet (apart from archaeological specimens) from the cultural sphere of Iran and Central Asia.

When Timur, the Turko-Mongolian military commander, was building up his empire he adopted the policy of his predecessors in taking capable craftsmen from the territories he conquered back to his capital city, Samarqand. In doing so he laid the foundations of an essentially Persian culture in Central Asia that led to a brilliant flowering of the arts during the fifteenth century. We know the subsequent history of some of the craftsmen taken into service by Timur because they were released by Timur's grandson, Ulugh-beg, in 1411 and some of them sought employment in the Ottoman court at Bursa. The puzzle is that despite the fact that so many craftsmen were taken to Samarqand, very few textiles have been identified as having been made there during the reign of Timur, or in Herat at the court of Timur's successors.

It is tempting to speculate that released textile workers seeking employment in Bursa could have brought back with them skills learned in Central Asia, as we know was the case with ceramic specialists. From its position as a thriving centre of the silk trade Bursa quickly developed into a major silk-weaving city. Bursa silks are on record as having been produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, although the major development in the weaving of silks occurred in the second half of the fifteenth century. By the end of the century there were more than a thousand looms in operation there.[10] It is also a possibility that weavers recruited from Ulugh-beg's former workforce introduced the triple spot motif (see cat. nos 3 and 5), which became such a distinctive feature of Ottoman textiles and decorative arts in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[11] The importance of Bursa as a centre for trade in raw silk continued into the sixteenth century and beyond, a fact of history which casts doubt on the veracity of Procopius's account of how sericulture came to Byzantium. The point here is that although sericulture was practised in Anatolia and Syria, the Byzantine and Ottoman silk-weaving industries were both dependent on the import of silk from the Caspian coastal provinces of Iran, which produced the highest quality silk.[12] In an attempt to do economic damage to the emerging economy of Safavid Iran (1501–1722), in 1518 the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (ruled 1512–1520) imposed a blockade on the movement of silk from Iran to the territories over which he had control. The result was that he damaged his own economy more than that of his enemy, and the blockade was lifted in 1520 by his successor, Sultan Suleyman (ruled 1520–1566).[13]

Turkish woven silks, particularly velvets, acquired an enviable reputation and found a ready export market in spite of fierce competition from Italy. A major consumer was Russia, where some of the finest examples have been preserved as ecclesiastical vestments, furnishings and horse caparisons. In view of the enormous number, vast range and extraordinary quality of the surviving Ottoman silks and velvets, it comes as a surprise that the weaving of silk-piled carpets appears to have been unknown to the Ottomans before recent times, though it was practised at a high level in Iran and to some extent in India, Egypt and Spain. There is also a question surrounding the few surviving silk tapestries attributed to Ottoman looms. Not only are these tapestries extremely uncommon but their colouring and technique (leaving aside the design) are typically Persian. The best known example is a fragment in the Textile Museum, Washington DC.[14] The basis on which this textile is attributed to an Ottoman source is its similarity in form to an undoubtedly Ottoman velvet in the Benaki Museum, Athens,[15] and the presence in its decoration of a stylized hyacinth rendered in the

Ottoman manner. A related example documented by Aga-Oglu in the shrine of Imam Ali at al-Najaf is classified as Persian without question, in spite of the presence of stylized tulips and carnations.[16] It is insufficiently recognized that tulips, carnations and other flowers occur in Safavid as well as Ottoman ornamentation, though admittedly not with the same insistent frequency and variety. Tulips appear, for example, in the border of a fragmentary tapestry thought to have been made in Kashan on the order of King Sigismund III Vasa of Poland in 1602.[17] In the absence of powerful evidence to the contrary, it seems to me that all the known silk, shared-warp tapestries, such as cat. no. 11, should be accepted as Persian.

This tapestry (cat. no. 11) bears witness to the major cross-fertilization of ideas between China and the Islamic world that began in the Tang period (AD 618–907). What interests us here is the movement from east to west, which came in several waves. The most important was the link between China and Iran that occurred during the *pax Mongolica* when Chinese influence appears in painting, costume, ceramics, and indeed all the decorative arts. It was at this time that the dragon, phoenix and lotus were introduced as symbols of royalty, soon to pass into general currency. Chinese imports – ceramics, textiles, lacquer, paintings – continued to arrive in Iran and Central Asia and all of them played a part in the transmission of artistic ideas, but it was in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, when embassies were exchanged between China and the Timurid court, that another major wave of influence entered the art of Iran and Central Asia.[18] This phase is characterized by the appearance in the decorative vocabulary of a variety of birds and animals, both mythical and real. The earliest dateable examples are from the 1430s, and the style persists to the end of the century. The Timurid court in the fifteenth century was exceptional for the quality of its artistic patronage, so much so that it provided a model for imitation by other rulers. Artistic fashions current in Herat thus spread to other centres, among them Tabriz, soon to become the principal city of the Safavid dynasty. A further injection of Timurid artistic ideas into the emerging Safavid style came in 1510 when Herat, the Timurid capital, fell to the Safavid army. Following established tradition, accomplished craftsmen were taken from Herat to Tabriz to put their skills to work for their new master. The result of this was that the Timurid 'animal style' took root in Safavid art to become almost its most characteristic feature. The silk tapestry (cat. no. 11) is a classic example of this development.

The early Safavid 'animal style' persisted through most of the sixteenth century until the reign of Shah Abbas I (ruled 1587–1629), who favoured a more austere

'animal-free' style, such as we see in cat. no. 14. As a broad generalization the same can be said of Ottoman taste; when Persian craftsmen were captured and put to work in Istanbul, they continued to include animals in their designs, but not for long. The animals were soon eliminated from the vocabulary of Ottoman ornament. The inclusion of animals in Persian designs may seem strange in view of the Islamic prohibition of making images of living creatures. Two comments can be made about this. The first is that the prohibition was always strictly observed in relation to the decoration of buildings and other works dedicated to a religious purpose, such as a mosque or a Quran, whereas for the decoration of spaces and objects for private enjoyment, a more relaxed approach prevailed. The second is that with many objects decorated in the 'animal style' there is no sense that we are witnessing a portrait of nature. Many of the animals are mythical creatures belonging to an imaginary other-world. To make a charge of idolatry against these designs would be ridiculous. That argument may be less applicable to the two Persian velvets with figures (cat. nos 7 and 8), though it must be said that these are fanciful figures, not portraits; they are simply elements of design arranged in a pleasing pattern – we still have the sense of looking at something belonging to the world of imagination.

The question of whether or not such designs conformed with the strictest interpretations of Islamic law has to be answered in the light of the workings of the real world. We are, after all, looking at objects made by the most skilled craftsmen of the day using the most costly materials. Such textiles and carpets were items of immense value, accessible only to the super-wealthy – some indeed appear to have been made for royal use. The people who could afford to own such things belonged to the highest levels of society; they were the leaders of taste and fashion. If it pleased them to have figural textiles for private use, who was to say otherwise? But when it came to more public matters, such as the textile shown as cat. no. 9, possibly commissioned by Shah Abbas I as a gift to the shrine of Imam Ali, the accepted ethical norms of modesty and restraint prevailed – there is not a creature in sight.

The carpets and textiles shown here give us a glimpse of a world in which textiles played an immensely important role. Their high value made textiles a desirable gift, and in the Islamic world the giving of costly robes by the ruler was an instrument for the maintenance of social order, since in these communities the type of cloth a person wore signalled their rank and status. Textiles of the quality seen here were scarce and valuable at the time they were made. Now, with the passage of time, they have become documents of extraordinary rarity – some, indeed, are unique.


RUSSIA
POLAND
ROMANIA
Venice
ITALY
Black Sea
CAUCASUS
Caspian Sea
SPAIN
Cordoba
Granada
Istanbul
Bursa
TURKEY
ANATOLIA
Mediterranean Sea
Tunis
SYRIA
Damascus
Jerusalem
Baghdad
Al Najaf
IRAQ
Tabriz
Kashan
IRAN
Esfahan
Herat
Samarqand
CHINA
Tarim Basin
TIBET
Delhi
Jaipur
INDIA
QATAR
EGYPT



1 CURTAIN WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Inscriptions in Arabic: In yellow rectangular panels (also in mirror reverse): *Sovereignty is God's alone*. At each end in yellow on a dark blue ground: *Sovereignty belongs to God*. Beneath the row of arches at one end in white on a red ground: *There is no victor except God*, which is the Nasrid motto, and beneath it in yellow: *Good fortune*. In the centre panel in white on a blue ground (repeated in mirror reverse): *Good health*, and above it also in mirror reverse: *Blessing*. At right angles in a narrow band on either side of the centre panel, repeated in white on a blue ground: *Greatness belongs to God alone*.

This curtain is made up from six pieces. There is a complete panel on the left and a matching panel on the right with a repeating mistake in it, best seen at the bottom where the yellow rectangles are shorter on the right than those on the left. To make up the length, an extra blue-ground panel has been added on the right at the top. A narrow panel in the centre, sewn in upside-down relative to the rest of the curtain (detail illustrated on pages 22–23), links the two main panels and an extra, non-matching piece has been added at both ends.

At first sight the whole curtain is remarkably like one in the Cleveland Museum, indeed it could almost be a pair.[19] On closer inspection, however, small differences become apparent which are extremely interesting in themselves. Take for example the yellow squares in the main field with inscriptions; in the Cleveland curtain all the inscriptions read the same way, which calls for greater skill on the part of the *naqshband* who prepares the thread-model or weaving programme (*naqsha*) used to direct the weaving process. On the other hand the calligraphy in the Cleveland curtain is less skilfully executed. Both curtains, it seems, were derived from the same master drawing and the drawing was translated into the required *naqsha* by two *naqshbands* with different skills who may even have been working in separate workshops.

The closeness of the design of these curtains to the décor of the Alhambra and other Nasrid buildings is unmistakable, and there can be little doubt that they were produced in conformity with a decorative style prevailing at that time.

Silk lampas
Nasrid Spain, 15th century
383 x 270 cm, six joined panels
TE.06.99













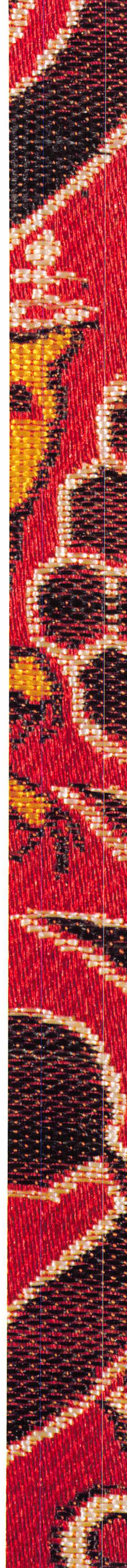
2 CONFRONTING HERALDIC LIONS

The design of this textile was evidently extremely popular for it exists in at least five variations and taken together, including all the variants, more than thirty-five pieces survive.[20] At the Hispanic Society of America in New York several pieces of a closely related textile have been carefully joined together to make a panel large enough to cover a wall. The colour scheme is similar in all of them, though some have a dark green ground with crimson leaves. In this example a crimson ground bears a device with pairs of crowned, confronting heraldic lions in yellow. The lions are placed in offset horizontal rows beneath an arch formed by pairs of dark green curved stems which curl back on themselves and terminate in a kind of leaf divided into four finger-like projections. This divided leaf appears to be a conscious reference to a style of decoration that was brought to Spain from the East after the massacre of the family of the caliphs of Damascus in AD 750, the event which led to the foundation of the first Islamic dynasty in Spain. This style reached its full flowering in the tenth century, and can be seen today in the decoration of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, where the leaf-like forms (originally a pair of wings) appear as a characteristic feature of its décor. The use of this motif was itself a deliberate reference to a decorative scheme found in Umayyad architecture, notably in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which itself employs motifs from the art of pre-Muslim Sasanian Iran.

It is possible that textiles such as this lampas were produced by Muslim weavers for the Christian market and that the heraldic lions are a reference to the emblem of the kingdom of León-Castile.



Silk lampas
Spain, late 15th century
68.5 x 40 cm, incomplete
TE.33.98





3 TRIPLE SPOTS IN BANDS

Though simple in concept this textile has an understated quality of quiet refinement. The triple spots motif, here with the added inner circle which converts the spot into a crescent, is used as a decorative motif without the accompanying stripes found in the earliest royal caftans. Its refinement is also evident in the sophistication of its structure.

This textile demonstrates with particular clarity the ingenious way in which metal thread was used to add colour and brilliance to costly textiles. The eye sees two different qualities of metallic lustre – silver and gold. In fact the metal, an alloy of silver and gold, is the same in both cases. To achieve the metallic lustre, minute ribbons of metal foil are wrapped spiral-fashion round a silk core. The metal ribbon does not cover the silk entirely, so a tiny amount of the underlying silk core remains visible on the surface. When a silver colour is required the metal is wrapped round a white silk core; for a gold background, the silk core is yellow. In this case a further device has been used to enhance these effects. In the silver background an additional white silk weft runs alongside the metal weft, and where a gold effect is required an extra yellow weft is present. The eye integrates the colours of the metal and accompanying silk thread to give two quite distinct colours, and it is often quite hard to believe that the silver and gold effects in this textile are both produced by the same metal foil wrapping.

Other textiles of this general type are known which also have this long, narrow format. It is possible that these textiles were used as containers for diplomatic letters, a usage known from Persian envelopes preserved in Sweden.[21]

Silk compound weave
with precious metal thread
Ottoman Turkey, 16th or 17th century
70 x 17 cm, incomplete
TE.34.98

front

back









4 FLOWERS AND ARABESQUES IN HORIZONTAL BANDS

In 1554 Kara Mehmet Chelebi became head of the painters at the Ottoman court in Istanbul. He is credited with making popular a style of decoration which began in the 1540s when he painted the inner cover of a book, now in the library of the Topkapı Saray, in an entirely new manner.[22] The outer cover is austere and restrained; the inner cover, in complete contrast, is painted with an elegant composition of brightly coloured flowers. In a major departure from contemporary Persian painting, in which flowers are typically painted in a flat, stylized and often fanciful manner, the flowers he painted have a realistic three-dimensional quality.

The style that then developed, and which is sometimes called the Kara Memi (his nickname) style, is characterized by patterns made with graceful juxtapositions of recognizable flowers. In this textile, in the light blue stripe, we see hyacinths, rosebuds, lilies and stylized tulips, though the mottled petals bring fritillaries to mind. The other stripes contain variations of these with the addition of other multi-petalled flowers – which may be intended to represent carnations, since, when we meet this floral décor elsewhere, the carnation is almost invariably present. Indeed, tulips, carnations, hyacinths and rosebuds are the most commonly found flowers in what is also called the 'four flower style', which came to dominate the decorative arts in Ottoman Turkey during the second half of the sixteenth century and which continued, with endless variation, well into the seventeenth. Separating the floral stripes are narrow bands of abstract arabesque forms which hark back to an earlier decorative style fashionable in the fifteenth century.

The red colour visible here has resulted from the wearing away of the pattern-forming wefts to expose the underlying ground weave.

Silk compound weave
with precious metal thread
Ottoman Turkey, second half of the 16th century
73 x 33 cm, incomplete
TE.10.97



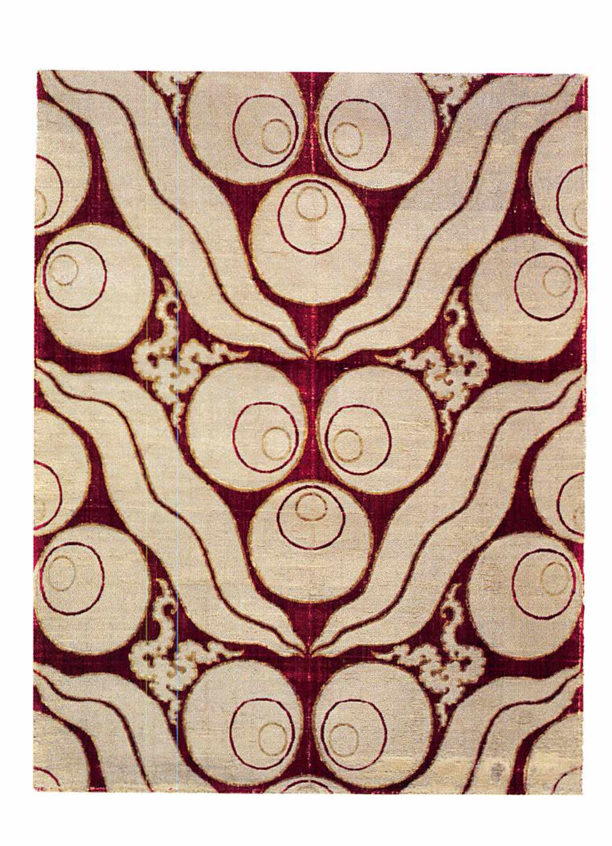
5 TRIPLE SPOTS AND WAVY STRIPES

The basic technique used to produce velvet was known long ago in Pharaonic Egypt. Initially it was used to make crude piled fabrics such as mats and towels. Its application to silk weaving and the invention of silk velvet have until recently been seen as a European invention,[23] but it is now thought to have originated in thirteenth-century Iran.[24] By the fifteenth century velvet production in the Ottoman world was centred on Bursa, and it was only in the sixteenth century that a workshop was established in Istanbul to provide velvet for the court.[25]

The earliest Ottoman velvets have a strikingly simple design of spots and wavy stripes on a plain ground. The origin of this design has been the subject of much debate. The most likely explanation is a tradition that the ancient kings wore the skins of powerful animals. In Persian painting of the fourteenth century rulers were depicted wearing the striped skin of a tiger and the spotted skin of a leopard with the spots typically in groups of three arranged in a triangle, a convention which certainly antedates the fourteenth century. Timur adopted this motif as his emblem and had it stamped on his coins.[26] It is perfectly possible that the triple spot motif had associations beyond that of power and kingship for it had long been used to represent the Buddhist eternal wish-granting jewel or *chintamani*, but in spite of the fact that this name is commonly given to the Ottoman triple spot motif, the Buddhist connection is not clear.

With the rise of Ottoman power tiger stripes and leopard spots appear to have been combined and in Ottoman art it appears in the second half of the fifteenth century on imperial quality velvets and garments worn by the sultans. In the beginning this was probably an emblem reserved for royalty, but, as with sumptuary codes the world over, royal emblems never stay exclusively royal for long and the spots and stripes motif passed into general currency, to remain popular throughout the sixteenth century.

The departure of the spots and stripes design of this velvet from the powerful austerity of the fifteenth-century velvets argues for a date in the mid-sixteenth century.



Cut voided silk velvet
with precious metal thread
Ottoman Turkey, mid-16th century
83 x 63 cm, incomplete
TE.29.98



6 CUSHION COVER WITH OFFSET ROWS OF CARNATIONS

The well-to-do Ottoman home had a main reception room devoid of furniture apart from a low shelf, the *divan* running round three sides of it. The *divan* was wide enough for sitting cross-legged and was furnished with a mattress to sit on and large, rectangular cushions (*yastık*s) to lean against, covered with rich textiles. The textile furnishings provided the main colour and visual interest in the room.

The 'four flower' style, discussed under cat. no. 4 above, began with recognizable flowers and over time developed into a rich repertoire of flower-derived patterns. This striking velvet is a classic example of the Turkish designer's art. Here large stylized carnations are carefully spaced on a plain ground in offset rows to form a powerful, uncluttered composition which at the same time is both calm and dignified. A neat touch is the way the calyx of the carnation takes the form of a tulip. This carnation design was one of the most popular patterns for velvets and it exists in numerous variations.

The size and form of this example – the rectangular shape with six small, lappet-shaped panels at each end – is typical of the cushion covers produced for the wealthy in the seventeenth century. The origin of the lappet forms at both ends has long been a puzzle. Some authors believe that it was a design that came into fashion in the seventeenth century.[27] However, recent research has established that in the fourteenth century and perhaps earlier it was the fashion to make cushions and pillow covers with actual tabs or lappets at the ends as a decorative feature. In the course of time the lappets themselves went out of fashion but their previous existence is remembered in the form of the vestigial lappet design we see here. This feature is almost invariably present in cushion covers of this period.



Cut voided silk velvet
with precious metal thread
Ottoman Turkey, 17th century
116 x 66 cm, complete
TE.11.97



7 STANDING PRINCESS AND KNEELING ATTENDANT

Many of the Persian textiles that survive from the high point of production during the Safavid period (1501–1722) have been preserved in Europe. Of the surviving velvets the best known are those woven in the seventeenth century (see cat. no. 8), a time when contacts with Europe were well established, ambassadors were exchanged and trade flourished. Velvets from the sixteenth century are much rarer. A clue to the date of this velvet is provided by the distinctive head-dress of both the man and the woman. The woman's is dome-shaped with a kind of crest at the apex. Above the forehead is a scalloped brim which is fashioned at the back into a thin tapering extension terminating in a forked arabesque form. In her right hand she holds a bunch of flowers. This figure's head-dress and some aspects of the composition are clearly based on a painting in the Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums (no. 1958.60.1), of a seated princess, which has been attributed to the painter Mirza Ali and is thought to date from the 1540s, the earliest possible date for the velvet.[28] This painting, thought to be based on a Chinese original, has been much copied. The head-dress of the man consists of a turban cloth wound around what appears to be a soft cap with a fuzzy outline, as if made of fur, which has settled towards the back of the head. Similar turbans are found in paintings commissioned by Shah Tahmasp's nephew, Ibrahim Mirza, in the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the style of drawing of the kneeling figure is close to the style of Shaykh Muhammad, who was active in the 1570s.[29] This was a time when Shah Tahmasp had substantially lost interest in the arts, which makes it possible that the velvet was commissioned by Ibrahim Mirza himself.

This rare and beautifully worked velvet, which was preserved in a European family collection, was designed to have several surface textures. The figures and foliage are cut velvet, while extra sparkle has been added to this by means of uncut loops of metal-wrapped silk thread. Thin strips of precious metal once covered the entire surface of the satin background. Most of this original decoration has been worn away.



Voided silk velvet with precious
metal thread, precious metal strips
and supplementary weft loops
Iran, third quarter of the 16th century
Two loom widths, each 164 x 72 cm
TE.09.98









8 COURT LADIES IN THE GARDEN

Inscription in Persian: *The work of Safi*.

In the seventeenth century, silk weaving reached a pinnacle of technical achievement in Iran. This example, with its many different colours and textures, bears witness to the extraordinary skill of the craftsmen of those times. The use of a silver-gold alloy with a high gold content for the background gives a real impression of the splendour of 'cloth of gold' and why it was so popular with the Mongol elite in the thirteenth century (see cat. nos 18 and 19).

Several pieces of the same textile are known. All are thought to have been formerly in the possession of the maharajahs of Jaipur, and all have been altered at some time by removing some of the pile and replacing it with embroidery, presumably to alter the signification of the female figures. Each has been given a nose ring, a mark in the centre of the forehead and a sprig in the head-dress. Originally each figure held a cup in one hand, and in the other a long-necked wine flask of the type shown in cat. no. 7. Both the cup and the flask have been transformed into vases with flowers. For the Iranian client, the wine cup and flask could be seen either as referring to pleasure – for it was not unknown for the elite of Safavid Iran to drink wine – or thought of in terms of a metaphor much used in Persian poetry for the divine insight gained from engagement in the spiritual struggle. Whatever its meaning, it was clearly not to Hindu taste and the alterations were evidently intended to enhance the beauty of the women and to convey a sense of the abundance of nature.

It is just possible to make out a signature with two words, 'work [of] Safi', originally woven in black silk, which has corroded away leaving minute spaces in the ground weave. He was probably the designer of the velvet. The gently swaying posture of the women reveals the influence of the artist Riza Abbasi working in the 1620s and 30s; his style was widely copied by his followers. The presence of European influence in the costumes points to a date in the mid-seventeenth century.

The large size of the repeat, the multiple textures and the remarkable range of colours put this piece among the great weaving achievements of all time.

Voided silk velvet with precious metal thread and supplementary weft loops
Iran, mid-17th century
198 x 57 cm, loom width
TE.01.97



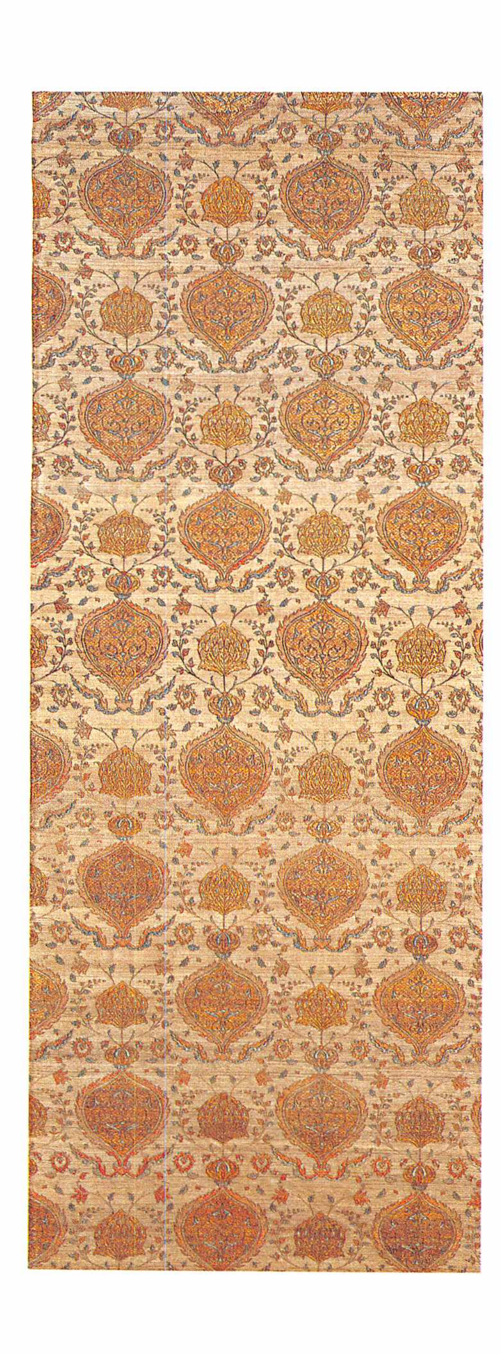




9 OFFSET ROWS OF PALMETTES

This textile, or a piece of the same weave, was seen and photographed in 1934 by the Turkish-American scholar Mehmet Aga-Oglu in the shrine of Imam Ali at Al-Najaf in Iraq, one of the most important holy sites and places of pilgrimage for Shiite Muslims. He also recorded the presence of other high class textiles and carpets. One multi-niche prayer carpet and a fragmented carpet of large size bear an inscription indicating that they were endowed to the shrine by Shah Abbas (ruled 1587–1629), thus it is perfectly possible that some of the valuable textiles in the shrine may also have been given by him at the same time, though there is no way of knowing this for certain.

This and other textiles documented at the shrine are of markedly superior workmanship and as such can be considered to be of imperial calibre. The extremely fine weave allows for the execution of minute detail in the pattern such as the veins on the leaves and the outline of what appear to be tongues of flame surrounding the ogival medallions. In common with other high quality textiles the surface is enriched with precious metal thread. Its colour style, with its paucity of strong primary colours and preference for orange, pastel blue, silver and golden-yellow tones, is in keeping with court taste of the early seventeenth century.



Silk compound weave
with precious metal thread
Iran, first half of the 17th century
93 x 36 cm, incomplete loom width
TE.08.98





10 COVER WITH BANDS OF LEAVES, CARNATIONS AND QURANIC INSCRIPTIONS

Inscriptions in Arabic (woven in reverse): In pale fawn on a yellow ground: *In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful*. As a cartouche in crimson on a silver-grey ground and in crimson on a pale crimson ground: Quran, Surah 48, verse 1, *Lo we have given thee a signal victory*. On the leaves of a stylized plant: Quran, Surah 61, most of verse 13, *Help from God and a speedy victory. Give good tidings to believers*. There is no clear indication as to why the inscriptions are woven in reverse.

It is difficult to be certain of the function of this textile. Its length and format limit the way it can have been used. The Quranic verses, set out here in ingeniously worked calligraphy,[30] were often chosen to decorate military banners and weapons – hardly applicable here. Textiles of similar format with bands were used to decorate the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul on special occasions, but these are characterized by a generally more geometric décor and were made in Tunis. The explanation often given for cloths of this shape is that they were used as tomb covers.





The stylized carnation – a typical Ottoman device – found in the narrow strip on a black ground could point to an Ottoman source, but a design feature that may be a better guide to the provenance is provided by the stylized cloud form at the base of the flower stems (see detail overleaf). This same form occurs in a double cloth in the Textile Museum, Washington DC,[31] which also incidentally displays the triple spot motif, normally associated exclusively with Ottoman textiles (see cat. nos 3 and 5). Double cloth is not, however, a weave found in Ottoman textiles, yet is characteristic for certain types of Persian textile. This would indicate that that the Washington textile is Persian, possibly woven for export to the Ottoman market, a complication in the classification of Near Eastern textiles which always needs to be borne in mind. Indeed the strong colouring of this example with its green and crimson-purple, not common in Persian textiles,[32] could indicate that this too is an example of a Persian textile woven for export.

Silk compound weave
with precious metal thread
Iran(?), 17th or 18th century
490 x 88 cm, loom width
TE.27.98







11 MYTHICAL AND OTHER ANIMALS, BIRDS AND FISH



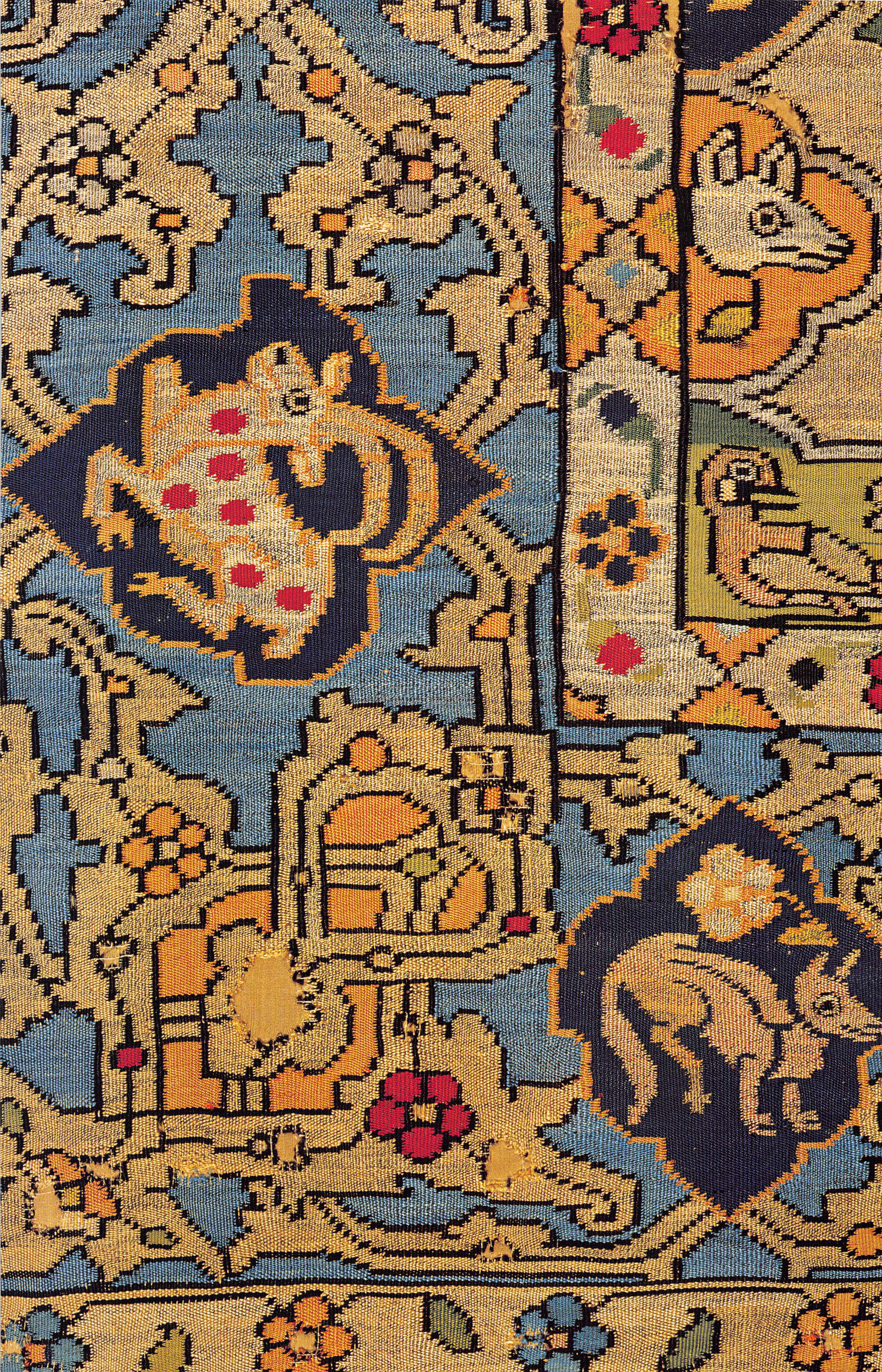
Silk tapestry weaving was already highly developed in China and Central Asia at the time of the Mongol conquest and the technique was probably introduced to Iran from the East in the late thirteenth or fourteenth century. The evidence for this is a sole surviving example in the David Collection in Copenhagen. After this there is a gap in our knowledge until the sixteenth century, the date of this example, when a number of imperial quality tapestries were produced in a slightly different technique – shared warp tapestry.

In the early Safavid period designs involving animals and mythical beasts are found in all the decorative arts. This 'animal style' was developed in the eastern Iranian lands during the rule of Timur's successors in the fifteenth century. The animals depicted in this tapestry have a variety of origins. Some, such as the phoenix and the *qilin*, a deer-like creature of good omen which is said to appear at auspicious moments in human history, derive ultimately from China. In addition to these exotic creatures we find others derived from an ancient indigenous tradition such as the bird of paradise, which resembles a peacock, and the animal-head mask, seen in both the field and the border. Such masks, which frequently appear in the borders of carpets, at entrances and at the periphery of enclosures, are thought to provide protection by warding off malign influences. In this tapestry the ensemble of animals does not seem to convey any specific symbolic message, rather it constitutes a decorative scheme typical for the mid-sixteenth century.

The execution of these complex, curvilinear patterns in shared warp tapestry represents a technical *tour de force*, and the presence of precious metal thread points to this having been a product destined for use only by the wealthiest members of early Safavid society.

Shared warp (toothed) tapestry in silk
with precious metal thread
Iran, 16th century
216 x 151 cm
CA.02.97









12 LAYLA AND MAJNUN

Inscription in Persian: *May felicity endure*.

This unusual rug remains something of an enigma. It was woven in silk using the tapestry technique. Silk tapestries of imperial quality are known (see cat. no. 11). They are few, yet fit perfectly with the style of other decorative objects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This weaving differs from them in several respects. First, Safavid tapestries are generally woven using the toothed or shared warp tapestry technique, an exacting process which gives strength to the fabric; this example, in contrast, is woven using a different technique, that of slit tapestry. Slit tapestry weavings are well known at a later period in Iran but they are usually made with fine wool and conform to the standard format in that they have main and minor borders; this piece has only a single narrow stripe for a border. Secondly, the design is unusual in that it is woven in the style of a Persian painting, albeit rendered in a rather naive manner. A feature common to both textiles and carpets of the Safavid period is that when figures are present they are used as elements of pattern in a unified composition. Pictorial carpets are a later phenomenon. Thirdly, its structure is unusual in that the yarn used for both warp and weft is S-spun, a mode of spinning used by Egyptian textile workers, though with silk this rule does not always apply, so it is not possible to base an attribution on this feature alone.

Taken together, these peculiarities make it very difficult to place this tapestry in any well-recognized cultural context. Large-scale curvilinear patterns are difficult to execute in slit tapestry technique so one wonders if it could have been a special commission or possibly an experiment, which may explain why this piece has so few counterparts. A silk tapestry apparently related to the present example was published in 1939.[33] It depicts a hunt and has a similar wide range of colours. Like the present example it is incomplete and has only a single narrow border.[34] While the subject matter of these two examples is clearly related to sixteenth-century Persian painting, in the absence of reliable evidence it would be prudent to be cautious about giving too precise a date to them.



Slit tapestry in silk
Iran(?), 16th to 19th century
179 x 129 cm
CA.01.97







13 MEDALLIONS, PENDANTS AND CARTOUCHES

In many ways a high point in the history of later Persian art was the reign of Shah Tahmasp, who ruled from 1524 to 1576. Under his patronage painting was practised at an exceptional level of excellence and the arts in general flourished. Unfortunately very few carpets from this period survive, but the few that do bear witness to the grace, elegance and sheer luxury of the finest silk carpets made for court use. This is one of a small and elite group of silk-piled carpets of imperial quality that are known to have been produced in that period. They divide into two types: those with depictions of animals and those without. This example has a completely abstract décor with a central, cloud-fringed 'medallion' which appears to float upon a background of scattered floral designs, linked together by delicate tracery. In each corner is a quarter medallion which is related to, but does not match, the central design. In many respects this rug does not fit readily with the other known silk rugs of the period, which form a compact group with many shared motifs. However, it does have certain design features that link it with both silk and woollen carpets of the period. Furthermore, silk rugs are known to have been made in several different places; this could be the sole surviving example of the output of a particular workshop.

The centralized layout seen here of four complementary corner-pieces is one much favoured by bookbinders and its use in carpets may ultimately derive from the arts of the book. While carpets with narrative scenes, such as cat. no. 12, refer to a readily recognizable allegorical story, it is difficult to know if abstract designs of the type present in this carpet were imbued with meaning by the people who designed them. Some scholars have attempted to explain the design in terms of a religious iconography, for example that it is a cosmic diagram 'representing' the highest heaven. Unfortunately no written records exist that tell us what was in the mind of the people who designed and made these carpets.



Silk pile on a silk foundation
Iran, mid-16th century
234 x 177 cm, complete
CA.21.99







14 ARABESQUES



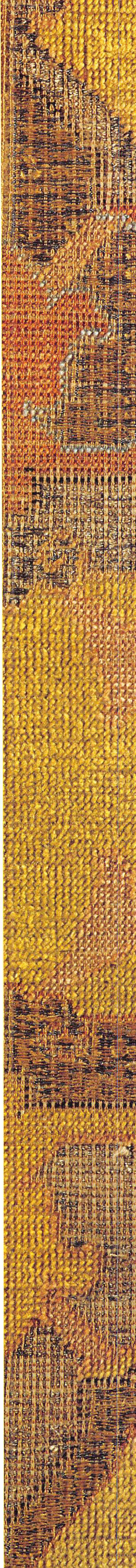
In the 1590s Shah Abbas made the decision to move his capital to Esfahan, and building works began in preparation for the move. Around this time a number of weaving workshops were established for the production of costly silks and carpets, both for use by the court and for the purposes of promoting foreign trade, a policy that Shah Abbas was keen to pursue. These workshops appear to have been privately run but were also able to fulfil orders for the court.

Substantial numbers of the type of carpet thought to have been produced in these workshops have survived. They were made with expensive materials and were clearly intended to impress. Most of those that do survive came into the possession of wealthy European families, many by way of trade but some also as the result of diplomatic gifts. One such gift which has been important for the dating of these carpets was made by Shah Abbas to the Doge of Venice in 1603; a second embassy brought more silk rugs in 1622. These are preserved in the treasury of the Cathedral of San Marco in Venice.[35] It must be said, however, that the carpets preserved in the treasury of San Marco differ somewhat in character from the large group of carpets currently associated with Shah Abbas I and Esfahan. The former presumably represent the earlier production, while the latter probably continued to be produced – as velvets were[36] – during the reigns of his successors, Shah Safi (1629–1642) and Abbas II (1642–1666).

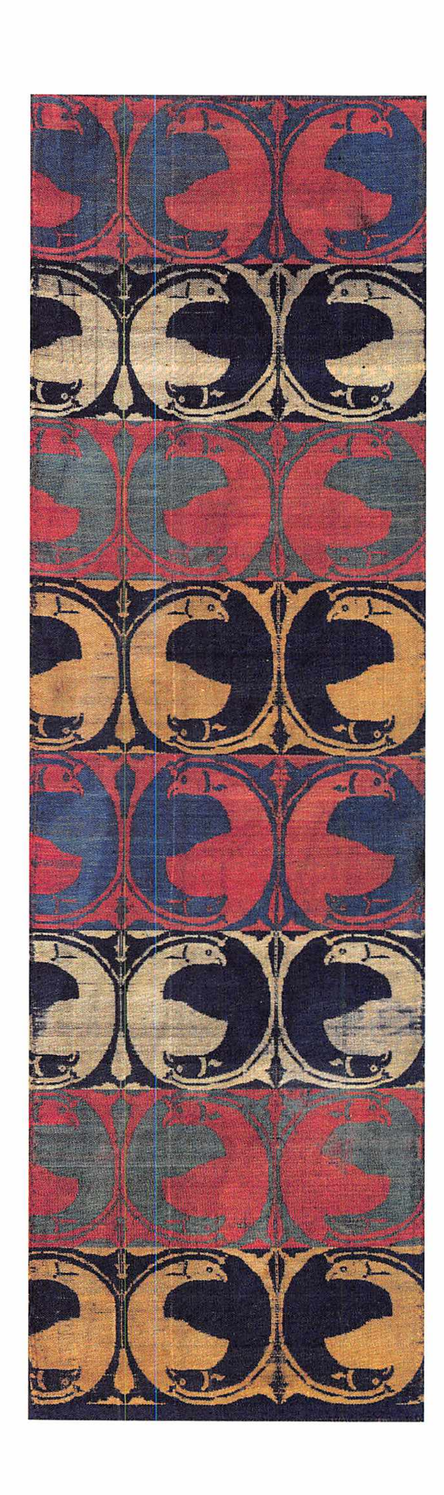
Carpets of this type have a distinctive appearance with a lustrous silk pile enriched with glistening details in precious metal thread. Their soft, pastel colours include lime green (as in this example), golden yellow, pale orange, silver-grey, powder-blue and generally light shades of red. The metal thread, typically gilded silver, which originally added a touch of brilliance to the surface, is often tarnished because the gold content is rather low.

Their design is a mixture of highly elaborated, almost rococo patterns which have features in common with the design of black-line painted tiles in the Imam (formerly Shah) Mosque in Esfahan, and simpler, more austere patterns, as in this example, which hark back to a classical past.

Silk pile with precious metal thread
on a cotton foundation
Iran, 17th century
215 x 143 cm, complete
CA.03.97







15 RECIPROCAL BIRDS

Political changes in Tibet have resulted in the destruction of social and religious structures of very long standing. Many monasteries have been abandoned or ruined and their contents taken or scattered. As a result, textiles that were preserved for centuries under near ideal conditions have filtered through to the Western market. The wealth of material has astonished and delighted collectors and historians of the textile arts. One aspect of this unexpected event has been the emergence of silks a thousand and more years old with colours as fresh and bright as if they were made yesterday. Another is the appearance of textiles belonging to weaving traditions that were hitherto unknown because, apart from those preserved in Tibet, everything else has perished. Research is still going on to gain a better understanding of these traditions and as time passes their place in the history of weaving is becoming clearer. This silk belongs to one such lost tradition.

A number of pieces are known that have colours and weaving technique similar to this example. Their designs – soldiers wearing dhotis accompanied by elephants – suggest an Indian origin. Their structure – samit – is particularly fascinating because silks with this weave had already been perfected in Sasanian Iran perhaps as early as the sixth century AD. When a further refinement in weaving technology, made around AD 1000, introduced the weave now called lampas, the weaving of samit gradually dropped out of use among the leading producers of textiles. In more culturally remote areas the new technology was slower to be introduced and the old-style samit continued to be woven. Preliminary carbon-14 dating tests suggest a date not earlier than the late medieval period for this textile.

The striking pattern of this silk, produced both by the interlocking design and the repeats brought about by the weaving process, is visually arresting and challenging. Moreover, it derives from an aesthetic that is basically foreign to Indian art. It could be that in this case the weavers were influenced by foreign ideas, or that the silks with Indian imagery were made outside India specifically for Indian taste.

Silk samit
India(?), 13th to 15th century
80 x 24.5 cm, incomplete loom width
with one original end
TE.24.97





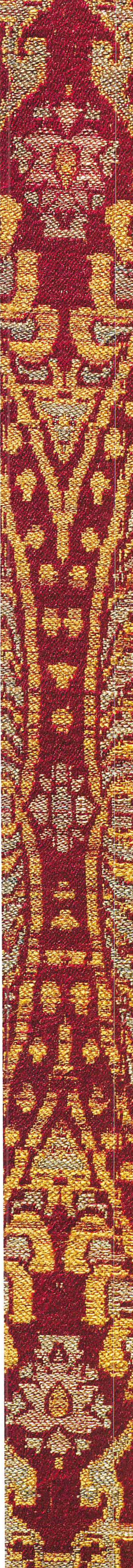
16 MYTHICAL ANIMALS IN LATTICE

As with cat. no. 15, this is one of several dozen silks that have come out of Tibet and that belong to a hitherto barely documented weaving tradition. In this case the attribution to an Indian source, possibly western India, is made with greater confidence. In the first place, a substantial number of these silks have similar colouring to this example and depict similar subjects, and the two sets of animals within the lattice can be related to India, especially the creature in the centre (see detail opposite). Its gaping jaws and elongated trunk-like snout provide a clear link to Makara, a kind of crocodile associated with the goddess of the sacred river Ganga. Furthermore, these animal silks also relate to another type of silk decorated with abstract motifs and vegetal decoration in which connections with the art of Islamic India can be recognized.[37]

In structure this textile belongs to a group of lampas weaves which are later and technically more advanced than samit (cat. no. 15). This particular pattern appears to have been produced over a lengthy period, because by comparing the different variations it can be seen that changes have occurred in the design that are best accounted for as having happened in sequence with the passage of time. This example comes near the beginning of the sequence and could have been made as early as the fifteenth century.



Silk lampas
India, 15th or 16th century(?)
117 x 64 cm, loom width
TE.18.97









17 STYLIZED FLOWERS IN LATTICE

Though there is documentary evidence that carpets were woven in India prior to the sixteenth century, it is doubtful if any have survived. An important event for the development of Mughal art in general and carpet weaving in particular was the flight of Humayun, after his defeat in battle, from Delhi to the court of the Iranian shah, Tahmasp, in the 1540s. This was a time when Tahmasp was losing interest in the arts, so when Humayun left Iran on his way back to India, he was allowed to take with him talented artists from Tahmasp's outstandingly brilliant but now dwindling artistic workforce. Humayun died only a year after re-establishing his rule in India and the earliest Mughal carpets, clearly influenced by Persian painting, are attributable to the reign of his son Akbar (1556–1605).

In the seventeenth century, during the reign of Jahangir (1605–1627), Mughal carpets acquired a distinctive Indian character, though Persian influence is still in evidence. In the second quarter of the seventeenth century, during the reign of Shah Jahan (1627–1666), a new style of decoration, involving the depiction of realistic flowers, became widely popular in India. To this was added a lattice which forms a frame for the flowers. The framing lattice has a characteristic three-dimensional quality and is believed to derive ultimately from European art. At the beginning of the development of this style the flowers were depicted with an almost botanical accuracy, but by degrees they were transformed into flower patterns in which the flowers become increasingly symmetrical and stylized.

In this example we see the floral style in its maturity. The three types of flower are already symmetrical and formal and the three-dimensional frame has become highly decorated and rather rococo in character. Similar stylization is seen in the flowers in the border. These features argue for a date fairly late in the seventeenth century.

Although silk weaving reached a high level of excellence under Mughal patronage, silk carpets are rare. Court taste generally favoured carpets made with *pashmina*, the inner wool of the Himalayan goat. *Pashmina* combines the lustre of silk with the resilience and dyeing properties of wool, and is often mistaken for silk.



Silk pile on a cotton foundation
India, late 17th century
206 x 122 cm, incomplete
CA.07.97

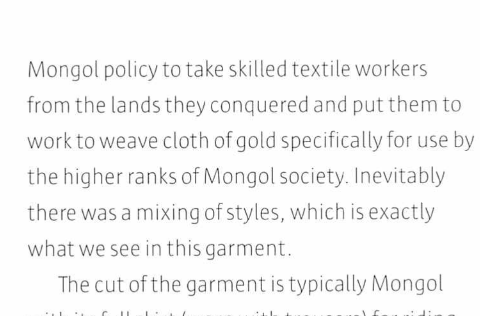




18 CLOTH OF GOLD ROBE WITH DOUBLE-HEADED FALCONS

In nomadic society possessions are few and they have to be portable. For this reason it has long been the custom for nomads to wear their wealth. As far back as Scythian times the steppe nomads wore gold ornaments sewn on to their outer garments. Even before the Mongol rise to power this custom underwent a subtle change. The nomads of Central Asia discovered that a similar effect could be achieved by having textiles with golden thread woven into the actual cloth. Recently many specimens of such cloth from the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) with discrete patches of gold-woven ornamentation have been unearthed in Central Asia. When the Mongols came to power they too wanted golden clothing, but they went one better, preferring what has come to be known as 'cloth of gold' in which the gold thread covers almost the entire of the surface of the textile. Producers from far and wide brought their cloth for sale to this new market. Soon it became an instrument of





Mongol policy to take skilled textile workers from the lands they conquered and put them to work to weave cloth of gold specifically for use by the higher ranks of Mongol society. Inevitably there was a mixing of styles, which is exactly what we see in this garment.

The cut of the garment is typically Mongol with its full skirt (worn with trousers) for riding and its broad wrap-over – normally left over right – and the extremely long sleeves. These would be worn drawn back and only extended over the hands in cold weather. The textile itself, worked entirely in gold thread, has a symmetrical design with a two-headed falcon surrounded by clouds (see detail opposite). The double-headed bird is known from twelfth-century Iranian textiles, though here it has been strangely altered. The outermost tail feathers have been transformed into a dragon's head. The clouds, on the other hand, are of Chinese inspiration as are the lotus flowers within the circles on the wings. The end border of the cloth, visible on the shoulder, has an interlaced design reminiscent of a certain type of ornamented Kufic script. Here it appears to have been interpreted by someone not truly familiar with that style.

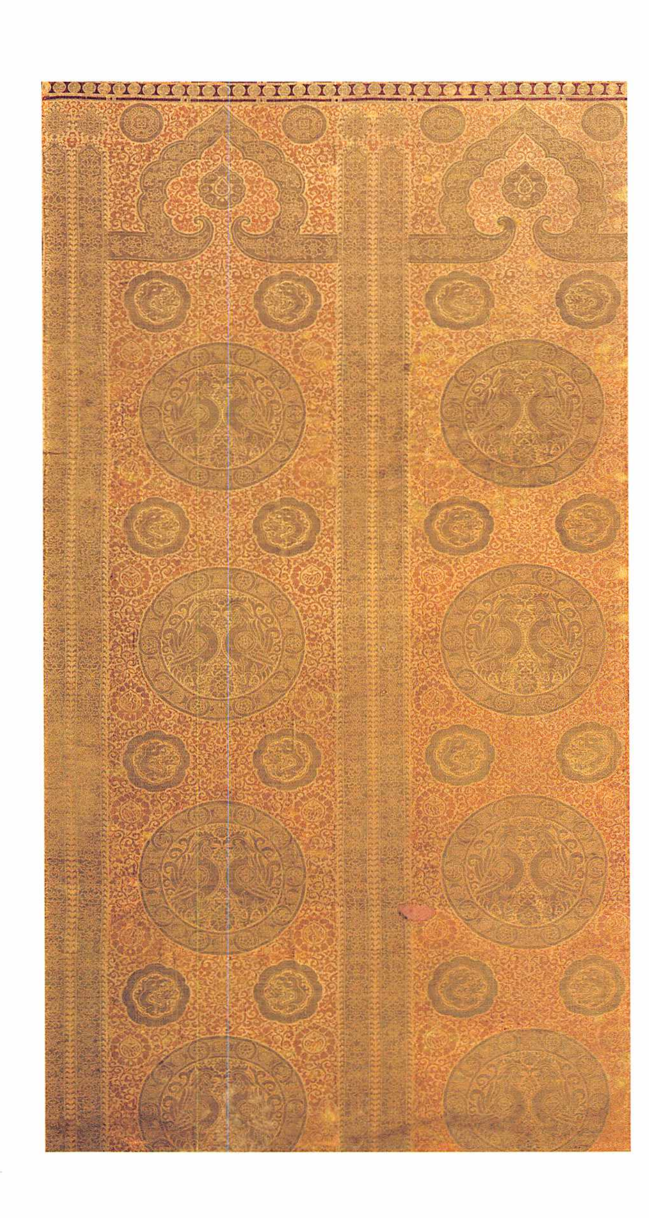
Silk lampas with gold thread
Central Asia, mid-13th century
Top of collar to hem 132 cm,
sleeve tip to sleeve tip 205 cm,
waist 80 cm
CO.111.00







19 CLOTH OF GOLD TENT PANELS WITH ARCHES AND ROUNDELS



The history of the Near East is punctuated by the repeated incursions of nomadic peoples from the steppes into the urban-agricultural lands of Central Asia, India, Iran, the Caucasus and Anatolia. The last major incursion was by the Mongols. The economy of pastoral nomads is based on the maintenance of large numbers of animals so the need for pasture dominates the way nomads live; to find suitable grazing they have to be prepared to move. With the establishment of Mongol rule in Iran in the thirteenth century, a compromise was made between the nomadic lifestyle and the fixed seat of government favoured by former urban-agricultural rulers. Some permanent buildings were established, but the government remained largely mobile, something which continued to a degree for the next four hundred years. Accordingly the rulers and their officials set up large encampments containing massive tents, lavishly furnished with costly textiles. As outlined in cat. no. 18, textiles in-woven with gold were a luxury item highly attractive to the Mongols. Extravagant quantities were given to tribal chieftains in order to maintain their continuing loyalty.

When the Mongols started using captured workers to make cloth of gold for themselves, a fascinating, if confusing, period of textile history ensued, which scholars are still struggling to understand. Before the Mongol invasions different weaving centres could, to a degree, be recognized by the specific character of their products, both in terms of the technical details of the weave and by the style of decoration. However, the Mongol rulers would take craftsmen from different places – Iran and China, for example – and put them together to work side by side in the same workshop. The mixture we see here of Iranian-style birds in roundels combined with Chinese-style dragons on a background of paeony scrolls is typical.

This extraordinary set of matching panels, almost certainly commissioned as the furnishing for the interior of a majestic tent (see page 13), demonstrates both the quality of weaving achieved under Mongol patronage and the original mixture of styles it engendered.

Silk lampas with gold thread
Central Asia, late 13th century
Six panels (one cut vertically),
234 x 122 cm,
223 x 123 cm,
224 x 123 cm,
225 x 122 cm (illustrated above left),
222 x 67.5 cm and 223 x 54 cm,
223 x 6.5 cm
TE.40.00













20 CENTRAL OCTAGON AND 'CHESS BOARD'

In the past five hundred years Iran has had a complex and turbulent history, with the result that most of the official written records and many material objects from the earlier years have been lost. Textiles, being fragile and easily destroyed, have fared particularly badly and as a result we know very little about the types of carpets and textiles produced during the fifteenth century. There is, however, ample evidence from Persian paintings and from such written sources as do exist that valuable carpets and textiles were produced in plenty at this time, so it was a matter of great interest when this previously unknown carpet, apparently of fifteenth-century date, came to light.

The pile of this carpet is worked in silk, and the small-scale endless-repeat pattern of the field is based on the design of Chinese silk textiles of the fourteenth century. The central field is dominated by a large octagon containing a radial design with volutes. Similar designs are well known in fifteenth-century Turkish carpets, often rather inexactly rendered as if copied from some earlier model. Thus questions arise as to where it was woven. It was not hitherto realized that carpets with octagons were also a Persian tradition, for they appear in paintings of the fourteenth-century Jalayrid school of western Iran and survive in a few fifteenth-century carpets of uncertain origin that are probably Persian.[38] This appears to be the earliest surviving example of that tradition. Another feature that would support a Persian or Central Asian origin for this piece (apart from its typically Persian weave) is the way the border design is neatly turned through forty-five degrees at each corner, a feature almost invariably present in the carpets depicted in Persian paintings but which is extremely rare in surviving Turkish carpets.

The presence of sixteen small squares laid out in the manner of a chess board (see detail overleaf) has given rise to much speculation. Depictions of people playing chess are seen in Persian paintings and it is certainly possible that this feature of the carpet was designed for that purpose. No other better explanation has yet been offered.

Silk pile on a cotton foundation
Central Asia, 14th to 15th century
371 x 162.5 cm, complete
CA.19.97







RELATED EXAMPLES

1 Published: Rippon Boswell, 1999, lot 39.

2 Fragments of the same textile: King and King, 1990, no. 39, p. 62; Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, no. 49, see Otavsky and Salim, 1995, pp. 248–9; Galloway, 1994, no. 17 (this appears to be the pair).

3 Other fragments of the same textile: *Hali*, 33, March 1987, p. 92; Lefevre, 1978, lot 31; Spink, 1998, no. 14.

5 Fragments of the same textile: David Collection, inv. no. 25/1962, see Folsach, 1993, p. 106; Al-Sabah Collection, inv. no. LNS11T, see Jenkins, 1983 p. 152.
Closely related: Atıl, 1987, p. 222, fig. 154.

6 Published: Sotheby's, London, 1991, lot 3; Herrmann, 1992, p. 30, pl. 10; Sotheby's, 1997, lot 225.

7 Published: Sotheby's, 1998, lot 37.
Other fragments of the same textile: Sarre and Martin, 1912, no. 2367; Tuchscherer and Vial, 1977, pl. 20.

8 Published: Sarkisian, 1981; Sotheby's, New York, 1991, lot 87; McWilliams, 2003.
Examples of the same textile: Keir Collection, see Spuhler, 1978, pp. 182–3, 187; Royal Ontario Museum, see Kahlenberg, 1973, pl. 22, and London, 1976, pp. 16, 110, no. 83.

9 The same textile: Shrine of Imam Ali at al-Najaf, see Aga-Oglu, 1941, pl. XV.

11 Published: Robinson, 1938; Erdmann, 1938; Sotheby's, 1976, lot 45; *Weltkunst*, November 1976, p. 2073; Bennett, 1978, p. 86.

12 Published: Christie's, 1990, lot 149; *Hali*, 51, June 1990, p. 187.

13 Published: Troll, 1951, p. 5, pl. 11; Erdmann, 1961; Erdmann, 1966, pl. 183; Erdmann, 1970, p. 74, pl. 66; Heinz, 1970–1, fig. 8; Schloss Halbturn, 1977, no. 45; Christie's, 1999, lot 190; *Hali*, 105, July–August 1999, p. 148.

14 Published: *Apollo*, vol. 110, no. 8, June 1979, p. 236; Sotheby, 1979, lot 85; *Hali*, vol. II, no. 3, 1979, p. 255.

15 Fragment of the same textile: George and Marie Hecksher Collection, see Dodds and Eiland, 1996, p. 259.

16 Same or similar textile: AEDTA Collection, no. 3653, see Riboud, 1998, pp. 74–5.

17 Published: Orendi, 1904; Neugebauer and Orendi, 1922, p. 25, fig. 14; Orendi, 1930, fig. 894; Orendi, 1932, p. 16, fig. 885; *Tapis*, 1989, pp. 166–7 (illustrated in mirror reverse).
Another fragment of the same carpet: Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait National Museum, inv. no. LNS15R, see Eskenazi, 1982, pp. 48, 49, 60 and 95, and Jenkins, 1983, p. 145. The early illustrations reveal that the Doha and Kuwait fragments were originally joined together and were cut apart sometime prior to 1982.

19 From the same set: David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 40/1997, see Folsach, 2001, no. 641, and Komaroff and Carboni, 2002, pp. 45 and 261.

20 Published: *Hali*, 89, 1996, p. 137; Whyld, 1996; Grube, 1997, p. 22, fig. 26; *Hali*, 100, 1998, p. 81.

NOTES

1 Traces of cotton cloth of an even earlier date, 4400–3000 BC, have been found in Jordan, presumably brought there from elsewhere. See Betts, 1994.
2. Tree cotton was also harvested in Nubia and the Sudan in Pharaonic times but it is not clear if the plant was indigenous to Africa.
3. Zhao, 1999, pp. 38–9.
4. Wild, 1984; Granger-Taylor, 1987.
5. This date is very approximate. A local legend speaks of a Chinese princess who brought sericulture to the region around the fifth century AD.
6. Procopius, *Gothic War*, 4/7.
7. Allsen, 1997; Wardwell, 1989; Watt and Wardwell, 1997.
8. These carpets should be reclassified as fourteenth century. Their designs are rather inadequately recorded in Durul and Aslanapa, [n.d.].
9. Spanish carpets of the type referred to are the so-called 'admiral' or 'armorial' carpets, see for example Mackie, 1997.
10. Atasoy, 2001, p. 161, with further references.
11. See note 25.
12. Lopez, 1945; Inalcık, 1974.
13. Inalcık, 1973, p. 124; Woods, 1976, p. 149; also Inalcık, 1974, pp. 211–18.
14. Mackie, 1973, cat. 13, p. 25 and illustration p. 55, inventory number not given.
15. Atasoy, 2001, p. 255.
16. Aga-Oglu, 1941, p. 39 and pl. 23. One can see from the illustration that this is shared warp tapestry.
17. Bier, 1987, p. 232. To classify this tapestry as Ottoman on the basis of its tulips would reduce to rubble an entire edifice of soundly based scholarship. See also note 34.
18. Timur's first ambassador arrived at the Chinese capital in 1387, gifts were sent by Timur in 1392 and 1393 and an embassy arrived in Nanjing in 1394. A Chinese envoy was sent to Samarqand in 1395; by 1403, the year Yongle came to the throne, the envoy had not returned, so a second envoy was sent. Timur died in 1405 while preparing to invade China. The first Chinese envoy eventually returned in 1407 – he had been detained by Timur during the preparations for war. Further exchanges took place with Chinese embassies arriving in Herat in 1412, 1417 and 1419. Most notable was a reciprocal embassy with over five hundred people which set out from Herat in 1419 and which included the artist Ghyathuddin Naqqash. He returned in 1422 and his account of the journey survives. See Bretschneider, 1888, pp. 256–66, and Thackston, 2001, pp. 53–67.
19. Dodds, 1992, pp. 33–9.
20. May, 1957, pp. 185–8, and figs 116–18.
21. Geijer, 1951, nos 37, 38.
22. Atıl, 1987, p. 59, fig. 18a depicts the inner cover of E.H.2851.
23. Burnham, 1959.
24. Monnas, 1993; Desrosiers, 2000; Sonday, 1999–2000.
25. Öz, 1950, p. 53; Atasoy, 2001, p. 196.
26. Not only did Timur use the triple spot motif as his *tamgha*, but as Barthold [Minorsky], 1958, p. 178 points out, Ulugh-beg, Timur's grandson, also used this motif on his coins.
27. Neumann, [1993], p. 52.
28. Dickson and Welch, 1981, vol. 1, p. 141.
29. Simpson, 1997, pp. 312–13.

30. The particular calligraphic style in which the letters are arranged to form a cartouche is found on other textiles; one in the Musée Historique des Tissus de Lyon dated AH 1123 / AD 1711–12 probably provides an approximate date for this piece. Errera, 1927, p. 95, illustrates a fragmentary textile which has a closely similar style of calligraphy. She proposes a much earlier date (fourteenth to fifteenth century) but no provenance. Another is in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, see Piotrovsky and Vrieze, 1999, p. 210, where Michael Rogers refers to the dated piece in Lyon. See also comments on a fragment with some similarities dated AH 1153 / AD 1740–41 in Folsach, 1993, p. 28.
31. Reath and Sachs, 1937, pl. 43.
32. Reath and Sachs, 1937, p. 32.
33. Pope and Ackerman, 1938–9, pl. 1092. Reported to be in the Yale University Art Gallery.
34. A third, non-figural tapestry, executed with exquisite precision in the manner of a Persian mosaic tile panel of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, is now in the Khalili Collection, TXT189. It has conventional borders and an entirely different colour scheme. See Christie's, 1987, lot 70, and Piotrovsky and Vrieze, 1999, p. 134, where Michael Rogers draws attention to a fourth example in the Bayerisches Armeemuseum in Ingolstadt (A.1855) which I have not seen. The Khalili Collection textile, which is wholly Persian in character (the tulips notwithstanding), is said to be slit tapestry; this is unlikely but I have not examined it personally. This example fits much more comfortably than the Layla and Majnun tapestry into a recognizable cultural context and may provide a link between the sole surviving Ilkhanid tapestry, see Folsach, 1996, and the imperial quality Safavid silk tapestries such as our cat. no. 11.
35. Curatola, 1993, p. 431.
36. For velvets dateable to the reign of Shah Safi at Rosenborg, see Bencard, 1995. The evidence offered puts their dating, circa 1636, into the category of probable rather than secure. The arrival in 1691 of a diplomatic letter enclosed in a velvet pouch of identical design to one of the Rosenborg velvets raises problems. Folsach, 1993, pp. 38–9, suggests that textiles with the same pattern could have been produced for more than fifty years.
37. Cohen, 1995.
38. I refer to the so-called 'para-Mamluk' carpets, a term that may be on its way out. In a forthcoming publication I shall propose a reappraisal, contrary to current thinking, along the lines that these carpets belong to a Persian tradition older than the Mamluk carpets, and that it was this production that provided a source for the vocabulary of ornament of Mamluk carpets rather than the other way round.

Abbas I Shah of Iran who ruled 1587–1629. He was a capable administrator, prolific builder and a great patron of the arts who enriched his country by establishing good trading relations with his neighbours, including Europe.

Alhambra The palace of the Moorish kings at Granada in southern Spain; named after Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar who, in 1273, began the building of what was to become one of the most beautiful surviving palaces of the Islamic world.

arabesque A term used to designate a type of ornament that is almost universal in Islamic art. It consists of a scrolling stem that branches into leaf-like forms; these in turn split and turn back on themselves while the branching stem continues. The stem and leaves can take a variety of forms.

Byzantine Empire The region comprising south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor which was the eastern wing of the Roman Empire. After Rome itself fell to Germanic invaders in 476, the capital shifted to Constantinople, a city originally called Byzantium, which had been rebuilt by Constantine the Great in AD 324–330, and renamed after him. Byzantium in the West and the Sasanian world in the East were the main superpowers of the late antique period, and also the main sources of artistic and cultural influence on the nascent Islamic states. Constantinople fell to the Muslims in 1453, when it was renamed Istanbul.

Chingis Khan The founder of the Mongol empire. He was born around 1162 and died in 1227 having conquered and established rule over an enormous area stretching from Poland and Romania in the west to China, Korea and Manchuria in the east. His sons and grandsons continued to rule large parts of this empire after his death.

cloth of gold A silk textile enriched with gold thread, much in demand among the Mongol aristocracy.

compound weave A technical term describing a weave in which the warp or weft is divided into more than one series, one of which appears on the face and the others on the reverse.

divan A low shelf for people to sit on, furnished with cushions and pillows, running round three sides of the main reception room in an Ottoman home.

Dome of the Rock The earliest surviving Islamic monument, built in 692 by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and richly adorned with mosaic decoration in the style of Byzantine churches in the region.

double cloth A textile with a warp in two series in which two textiles are, in effect, woven simultaneously, one becoming the surface and the other the reverse; the warps change position (to the surface or the reverse) as required by the pattern.

foundation When used in the description of a carpet, 'foundation' refers to the ground weave, i.e. the warp onto which the knots are tied and the weft which holds them in place.

four flower style A decorative style, introduced into Ottoman art in the 1540s by Kara Mehmet Chelebi (Kara Memi), characterized by the use of recognizable flowers worked into a great variety of patterns.

Humayun The son of Babur, who founded the Mughal dynasty in India. Soon after inheriting his father's kingdom in 1530 he was defeated in battle and took refuge at the court of Shah Tahmasp in Iran, from 1540 to 1555, the year in which he managed to regain the territory he had inherited in India. He died the following year and was succeeded by his son Akbar.

Ibrahim Mirza More correctly Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, a prince of the Safavid royal family of Iran, the nephew of Shah Tahmasp. He was a patron of the arts at a time when his uncle had lost interest in commissioning works of art.

Ilkhan The title used both for diplomatic reasons and as a mark of respect by the first Mongol ruler of Iran, Hülegü. It means 'subordinate khan', and was adopted when his brother Khubilai became the 'Great Khan' in 1260. Ilkhanid is the name given to the dynasty of Mongol sovereigns that ruled in Iran between 1256 and 1335.

Jahangir The son of Akbar, who became the fourth ruler of the Indian Mughal dynasty from 1605 to 1627. He was a discerning patron of the arts who introduced to India the cladding of buildings in marble, and it was during his reign that the Mughal flower style developed.

Jin dynasty A dynasty of Manchurian origin, which ruled northern China between 1115 and 1234. Though not true nomads they were herders. As rulers they adopted many of the customs of their predecessors, the Liao, who were of nomadic origin and who retained their nomadic traditions.

Justinian Byzantine Emperor (ruled 527–56). It is said that it was during his reign that the knowledge of silk production reached the Byzantine world.

Kufic script The name of a form of writing that takes its name from the town of Kufah in Iraq. It reached its first full development around AD 800 and came to be used as the preferred script for writing Qurans. It has a solemn, austere, and monumental quality and is characterized by the angularity and strong horizontal emphasis of its letter forms. Other variations of the script later emerged, including several decorative styles in which the vertical strokes are floriated, plaited, knotted or otherwise ornamented.

lampas The technical name for a type of silk textile in which two different structures (often twill and satin) are combined to produce a patterned weave with varied colours and surface textures.

Layla and Majnun The most celebrated love story in the Islamic world, written in 1188 by the Persian poet Nizami. Based on an earlier Arabian legend it tells the story of an intense love kindled in childhood between Layla and Qays who becomes a slave to love and is driven mad, whereupon he is called Majnun. Majnun becomes a poet who wanders in the desert keeping the company of animals, while Layla is carefully guarded by her family. They nevertheless manage to communicate secretly, and their love for each other continues through Layla's unconsummated marriage until both she and Majnun are released from their sufferings by death. The story, composed with consummate artistry, has deep inner meanings and has prompted many imitations; few, however, can compare with the original.

Léon-Castile Christian kingdom of northern Spain.

Makara A kind of crocodile associated with the goddess of the sacred river Ganga in India.

Mirza Ali A leading artist at the Safavid court from the 1530s to the 1560s, serving both Shah Tahmasp and his nephew Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. His father Sultan Muhammad was also a famous artist.

Mongols A mainly nomadic people still living in Mongolia. Their ancestors, under the leadership of Chingis Khan, came to rule one of the largest empires the world has known.

Mughal A dynasty founded by Babur, a direct descendant of Timur, which ruled in India from 1526 to 1858. At the beginning they saw themselves as Mongols, from which the word Mughal is derived.

naqsha A large scale model of every thread used in the weaving of a pattern. It is prepared away from the loom and then tied to the loom in a special manner so that the information in the thread model can be transferred directly to the loom as a means of controlling the weaving progresses. The operation of the *naqsha* requires an extra person who works in conjunction with the weaver.

naqshband A highly skilled person who makes the *naqsha* (see above).

nasij The Mongolian term for cloth of gold (see above).

Nasrid The Muslim kingdom of southern Spain, centred in Granada, which ruled from 1238 until 1492, when the combined forces of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, then united by marriage, expelled the last Muslim rulers from the peninsula.

Ottoman The name of a Turkish dynasty ruling in both Anatolia and Europe. Under the leadership of its founder, Osman, Ottoman strength grew from uncertain beginnings in the late thirteenth century to become a large empire and a world power. The dynasty ended in 1928 without war or major bloodshed.

pashmina The inner, down-like wool of the Himalayan goat, sometimes used for the pile of Mughal carpets of the highest quality.

pax Mongolica Means 'the Mongol peace'. After the enormous destruction brought about in the course of the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century there was a period of peace over a wide area when direct cultural links were established for the first time between China and the Islamic world.

Riza Abbasi An innovative Iranian artist, active in Esfahan between the 1580s and 1635, who is noted for his drawings and paintings of men and women.

Safavid The Shiite dynasty ruling in Iran between 1501 and 1722 which takes its name from Sheikh Safi, an ancestor of the first shah, Ismail I.

samit A type of patterned silk with a warp in two series which is patterned by wefts of different colours in two or more series. These costly silks were woven in Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine world before the invention of lampas. The name is a corruption of the Greek word *hexamitos*.

Sasanian A dynasty of Iranian kings that ruled Iran between AD 226 and 651, when the land was conquered by Arab forces.

satin A weave structure having a smooth, shiny surface formed either by warp or weft threads.

Scyths/Scythian A nomadic people occupying the steppe lands of what is now Ukraine and further east. In this region the steppes are dotted with numerous burial mounds dating from around 600 to 100 BC. A few contain substantial amounts of gold, including gold plaques sewn to the outer garments of the occupants.

Selim I Ottoman sultan, ruled 1512–1520. He was known as 'the Grim'.

Seljuk carpets A group of carpets found in two mosques in Turkey that were thought to have been made during the time of the Seljuk dynasty, which came to an end at the close of the thirteenth century. There is now doubt as to whether the carpets are that old. The Seljuks of Anatolia, whose language at court was Persian, were an offshoot of the Seljuk rulers of Iran, an originally Turkic people.

shared warp (toothed) tapestry In tapestry, the weft threads which form the pattern do not go across the width of the fabric but return within a small space to form a block of colour. In order to avoid a gap between adjacent blocks of differing colour, in shared warp tapestry the wefts of both colour blocks return around the same warp thread.

slit tapestry See previous entry. Here the wefts of the adjacent blocks of colour return around adjacent warp threads so there is a gap or slit between them. This structure is easier to weave but less strong than shared warp tapestry.

Suleyman Ottoman Sultan known both as 'the Law-giver' and 'the Magnificent', who ruled from 1520 to 1566, a time when the Ottoman empire was at a peak of prosperity and military efficiency.

supplementary weft Non-structural weft threads added to form a pattern.

Tahmasp Shah of Iran who ruled 1524–1576. He was a great connoisseur and patron of the arts as a young man, but in middle life he seemed to lose interest, and his previously brilliant artistic establishment was dispersed.

Tang dynasty A Chinese dynasty that ruled in China between 618 and 907.

Timur / Timurid Timur was born in 1336 and died in 1405 after a life of almost ceaseless warfare in which he had succeeded in conquering and dominating Central Asia and Iran as well as most of Anatolia, Syria and the plains of northern India. His capital was Samarqand. The dynasty of rulers he founded, known as the Timurid dynasty, came to and end in 1506. Though Timur's military empire was short-lived his successors were highly cultured patrons who became a model for imitation throughout the Islamic world.

Topkapı Saray The palace occupied by the Ottoman sultans for a major part of the period of Ottoman rule after the capital moved from Bursa to Istanbul in 1453, now a museum.

Ulugh-beg Meaning 'Great Prince', he was a grandson of Timur. He was born in 1394 and was governor of Samarqand from 1409 to 1449.

Umayyad The first caliphal dynasty of Islam, descended from Umayya ibn Abd Shams, a pre-Islamic notable of the tribe of Quraysh of Mecca (the same tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged). The Umayyads ruled all the territories conquered by Islam from their centre in Syria, from AD 661 to 750. In 750, however, the Abbasids usurped the caliphate in a bloody revolution. One of the few survivors, Abd al-Rahman, fled to North Africa and eventually to al-Andalus, where he re-established Umayyad rule.

velvet / (un)cut velvet / voided velvet A weave with pile formed by loops of warp raised above the ground weave by the insertion of rods or wires. If the rods are pulled out rather than cut out then loops are formed. This is uncut velvet. When the loops are cut a velvety pile is formed called cut velvet. If some areas are left without pile, these areas are called voided.

warp The series of parallel, longitudinal threads arranged on the loom before weaving begins. An individual strand of the warp is called an end in silk weaving, otherwise it is simply called a warp thread.

weft The series of transverse threads added to the warp in the process of weaving. An individual thread of the weft is called a shot, shoot or pick.

yastık A large rectangular cushion, used on the *divan* in an Ottoman home.

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